

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
TRAFFIC ENGINEERING DIVISION
INSTRUCTIONAL & INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

GENERAL SUBJECT: Signs	NUMBER: IIM-TE-337.3
	SUPERSEDES: IIM-TE-337.2
SPECIFIC SUBJECT: Clearview Highway Font Lettering for Guide Signs	DATE: March 4, 2019
	SUNSET DATE: None
APPROVAL: <div style="text-align:center">/original signed by/ Raymond J. Khoury, P.E. State Traffic Engineer Richmond, VA March 4, 2019</div>	

Changes are shaded

SUMMARY OF REVISIONS TO MEMORANDUM

- Clarification on justification for and use of Clearview as per FHWA request

EFFECTIVE DATE

Existing signs: Sign panels installed prior to this memo's issuance date may remain through the end of their useful service life, unless the District determines that legibility has been adversely affected.

Projects under design: If the project is in preliminary stages and the designer has not yet begun work on the signing plans, then the project shall be designed as per this memo. If the designer has begun work on the signing plans using Highway Gothic font for the mixed-case positive contrast destination messages, the plans should be revised to use Clearview font if such a design change can be implemented without impact to the project's budget or schedule.

Design-Build/PPTA: This Memorandum shall be effective for projects in which the design criteria package has not been completed for advertisement as of October 1, 2018.

Projects under construction: For construction contracts, in-house efforts, or maintenance activities that are already under construction, the plans should not be revised solely to change fonts, and signs that have already been fabricated shall not be rejected unless they fail to conform to the contract documents.

Maintenance activities: For maintenance replacement activities, the following provisions are effective immediately when feasible.

PURPOSE AND NEED

In conformance with FHWA directives regarding Clearview lettering, including their [*Design and Policy Use for Clearview Alphabet*](#) document, this memorandum clarifies VDOT's policy on when to use Clearview lettering and when to use FHWA Standard Alphabet (Highway Gothic) series lettering on guide signs.

BACKGROUND

Clearview lettering was developed to provide increased visibility and reduced halation (over-glow around letters) on highway guide signs, as compared to the FHWA Standard Alphabet series lettering. Research shows that Clearview lettering improves legibility, particularly for older drivers, as compared to Standard Alphabet lettering *when used appropriately*.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued [*Interim Approval IA-5*](#) in September 2004 for the optional use of this lettering on guide signs with positive contrast legends (white text on green, blue or brown sign background). VDOT subsequently requested and received a conditional usage statement that allows VDOT, localities, and other agencies that maintain roads in Virginia to use Clearview lettering in accordance with the Interim Approval and associated guidelines.

In January 2016 FHWA terminated Clearview font Interim Approval. However FHWA reinstated IA-5 Interim Approval in March 2018, as required by Division L, Section 125 of the federal *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018*.

STANDARDS

Section 1 - When to Use Clearview Lettering

Clearview lettering 5-W should be used instead of FHWA Standard Highway Alphabet series E-Modified lettering for the mixed-case portion of guide signs and destination signs. This includes ground-mounted or overhead guide signs, post-mounted street name signs, and overhead street name signs at traffic signals.

Section 2 – When Not To Use Clearview Lettering

Clearview lettering shall not be used under any of the following circumstances:

- Regulatory or warning signs.
- ALL UPPER-CASE lettering on guide signs. Examples include: NEXT RIGHT, MILE, EAST, or an EXIT number.
 - Legends that are required to be ALL UPPER-CASE in the MUTCD (e.g. cardinal directions, distance messages, legends on standard regulatory and warning signs) shall not be converted to Mixed Case lettering.
- Negative-contrast signs or sign elements (black lettering on white or colored background).

- Numerals or fractions.
- Overlay panels if other destinations on the same sign are in Standard Alphabet series lettering.

Clearview lettering 1-W, 2-W, 3-W, and 4-W should not be used without prior approval, as research has not shown a benefit as compared to their Standard Alphabet equivalents.

See the example in Figure 1 for further clarification on when to use Clearview lettering versus Standard Alphabet series lettering.

Section 3 - Sign Panel Layout when using Clearview

Signs that use Clearview shall use the [spacing and letter tables](#) developed by FHWA in conjunction with their Clearview font Interim Approval.

In accordance with the MUTCD, the inter-line spacing between two lines of legend should be approximately equivalent to the nominal loop height of the lower-case letters for the larger of the two legends. The loop heights of FHWA Standard Alphabet lower-case letters are approximately 75% of the height of upper-case letters. Clearview lower-case letters use a larger loop height than their Standard Alphabet counterparts, so inter-line spacing between a Clearview legend and another legend should be set by the Clearview font's design.

Regardless of the type of lettering used, the guide sign layout (including letter height, interline spacing, placement and size of arrows and shields, etc.) shall be in accordance with the MUTCD, the Virginia Supplement to the MUTCD, and the font design. Signs must have proper letter height and be properly designed for sufficient legibility.

Section 4 - Effects of Clearview on Sign Width

The proper use of Clearview 5-W lettering for mixed-case destination legends may cause the overall sign width to be greater than if the same sign were designed with Standard Alphabet series E-Modified. Clearview 5-W font should be used for such mixed-case destination legends unless that resulting wider sign will result in significant cost/engineering impacts. Examples include:

- When placing a new sign on an existing sign structure, if a narrower sign is necessary to avoid exceeding the structural capacity of the structure, or
- When placing an overlay panel on an existing sign, if a narrower overlay panel is necessary to fit on the existing sign, or
- If the use of a wider sign panel would require a cantilever sign structure longer than the maximum span length allowed by the latest version of TE Memorandum TE-375.

If the resulting sign width with Clearview lettering must be reduced because of significant cost/engineering impacts, the following steps should be considered:

- 1) Use Clearview 5-W-R font in lieu of Clearview 5-W font. 5-W-R is similar to Clearview 5-W, but with reduced spacing between letters (kerning) to reduce overall width.
- 2) If Clearview 5-W-R font will still result in a sign width that results in significant cost/engineering impacts, then Standard Alphabet Series E-Modified font should be used.

The spacing (kerning) between Clearview 5-W or 5-W-R letters should not be reduced from each respective font's default spacing.

Section 5 - Other Lettering

FHWA and other states are currently conducting research into "Enhanced E-Modified" lettering. This research is focusing on ways to keep the same basic shape of Standard Alphabet series lettering, but with narrower strokes and other slight modifications to enhance visibility. However to date this lettering has not been approved for use by FHWA or VDOT and shall not be used on any signs in Virginia without prior approval.

Lettering other than Clearview or FHWA Standard Alphabet series shall not be used on traffic control devices in Virginia, except for Community Wayfinding signs as per Section 2D.50 of the MUTCD or other VDOT-approved signs that explicitly allow for the use of other lettering.

REFERENCE

- [2009 MUTCD](#)
- [2011 Virginia Supplement to the MUTCD with Revisions](#)
- FHWA Design and policy use for Clearview alphabet:
<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/resources/clearviewdesignfaqs/index.htm>
- Clearview spacing charts: <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/clearviewspacingia5.pdf>

Figure 1 – Sample Sign Panel Layout

